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Given the Marine Corps' doctrine to task organize units into a MAGTF and create a whole greater than the sum of its parts, the Marine Corps should initiate efforts to strengthen ties to Special Operations aviation and eventually organize and equip an ACE permanently assigned to MARSOC, thus enabling MARSOC to train and fight as a MAGTF. After a Marine Corps plan to contribute a standing MAGTF to SOCOM was abandoned in 1991 due to concerns of parochialism, an increasing level of cooperation between the Marine Corps and SOCOM on the V-22 program and the GWOT paved the way for the formation of MARSOC. A longstanding dearth of Special Operations helicopters has been exacerbated by a growth in Special Operations forces (SOF) and a reduction in the numbers of SOF helicopters. Now that MARSOC is a reality and Marines are serving in MARSOC units, the Marine Corps should begin planning to provide a dedicated ACE to MARSOC.

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A DEDICATED AVIATION COMBAT ELEMENT TO MARSOC

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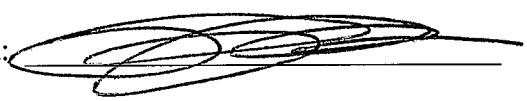
Approved: 

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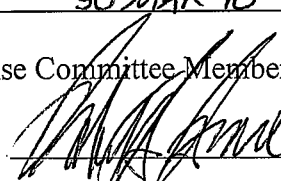
Approved: 

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: A Dedicated Aviation Combat Element to MARSOC

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Thesis: Given the Marine Corps' doctrine to task organize units into a Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) and create a whole greater than the sum of its parts, the Marine Corps should initiate efforts to strengthen ties to Special Operations aviation and eventually organize and equip an Aviation Combat Element (ACE) permanently assigned to Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), thus enabling MARSOC to train and fight as a MAGTF.

Discussion: After a Marine Corps plan to contribute a standing MAGTF to Special Operation Command (SOCOM)—deemed mutually beneficial to both organizations—was abandoned in 1991 due to concerns of parochialism, an increasing level of cooperation between the Marine Corps and SOCOM on the V-22 program and the Global War on Terror paved the way for the formation of MARSOC. Despite an historical aversion to contributing Marine units to SOCOM, the Marine Corps permanently relinquished forces at the direction of the Secretary of Defense upon the creation of MARSOC in February 2006. Two highly trained ground units were immediately transferred to MARSOC, and additional structure and manpower in the form of logistical and intelligence support would follow. Yet, notwithstanding the Marine Corps doctrine of the MAGTF, MARSOC has yet to attain any organic aviation assets. A longstanding dearth of Special Operations helicopters has been exacerbated by a growth in Special Operations forces (SOF) and a reduction in the numbers of SOF helicopters. Despite plans to increase the number of SOF helicopters and the imminent fielding of the SOF version of the V-22, shortfalls in SOF vertical lift assets make training and operations more challenging for SOF.

Conclusion: The formation of MARSOC was a difficult process for the Marine Corps, made more so by resistance to the permanent assignment of forces to SOCOM. However, now that MARSOC is a reality and Marines are serving in MARSOC units, the Marine Corps should begin planning to provide a dedicated ACE to MARSOC. Initially, the Marine Corps should seek to strengthen ties to SOCOM aviation units by expanding the Personnel Exchange Program, while fostering increased cooperation between MARSOC units and Marine Aviation. Additionally, the Marine Corps needs to make the commitment to providing MARSOC the strength and flexibility of the MAGTF. Finally, the Marine Corps has been successful in educating the Joint world on the strength of the MAGTF. Thus, the Marine Corps must begin to educate SOCOM on the inherent strengths of a MAGTF assigned to SOCOM and the optimal employment of such a unit. Alternatively, if the Marine Corps prepares for a battle for control of Marine assets while trying to convince the Joint world the MAGTF does not apply to MARSOC, any Marine aviation assets dedicated to MARSOC in the future and the resulting MAGTF will be alienated from the Marine Corps.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

Preface

After my first Fleet tour as a CH-53E pilot, I had the privilege of representing the Marine Corps on an exchange tour through the Personnel Exchange Program. I was very fortunate to serve with Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) flying MH-53Ms, where I trained and deployed in support of SOF. Serving within SOCOM as the only Marine within an AFSOC unit, I learned that Marines are truly unique, and bring a complementary mindset to the SOF world. While I had the privilege of leading and flying with some of the finest aircrews in the world, I became increasingly convinced that Marines could achieve the same level of expertise given the opportunity, training and equipment. As I learned more of the newly formed MARSOC, I developed the belief that a Marine Special Operations unit should have the flexibility of Marine Air.

In my research project, I felt that it was important to address the more basic question of why MARSOC needs an aviation component than detail exactly what such a component should look like. Therefore, I excluded lengthy discussions of what makes Special Operations aviation truly 'special', what specific type-model-series aircraft should be included in a MARSOC MAGTF and how such a unit should be organized. Instead, I hope that my efforts may serve as a starting point for conversations on dedicating an aviation component to MARSOC, the benefits to the Marine Corps and the relative costs of delaying such a decision.

Thanks to my advisor, Dr. Bradford Wineman, for his guidance and constructive criticism throughout this process. Also, thanks to Colonel Kelly Alexander, USMC and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Lewis, USA, for their encouragement to take on this project.

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Introduction

Until the creation of United States Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) on February 24, 2006, the Marine Corps was noticeably absent from United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM). The Marine Corps had at least two opportunities to contribute forces to SOCOM, but both times the Marine Corps abstained. Upon the creation of SOCOM in 1987, the Marine Corps did not commit forces and instead developed the concept of the Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). In 1990, coordination began for the development of a Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) for permanent assignment to SOCOM, but still the Marine Corps refrained from contributing forces to SOCOM. The MAGTF is the Marine Corps' concept of organization for combat and training, consisting of a task-organized unit of Marines from any required operational specialty (infantry, artillery, armor, aviation, logistics, communications, etc.) under one commander, capitalizing on unity of command, unity of effort and the inherent esprit de corps of Marines.[1] The MAGTF remains a central tenet of the Marine Corps' warfighting doctrine, and institutionally the Marine Corps has expended great effort to prohibit any element of a standing MAGTF from being separated from the whole, from the Commandant's White Letter 7-81 to the Omnibus Agreement of 1986 and ultimately to language now included in the Joint Publication 1.[2] However, plans for the permanent assignment of a MAGTF to SOCOM were abandoned in 1991 due to inter-service rivalries and parochialism.[3]

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the waging of the Global War on Terror and the increasing reliance on Special Operations Forces (SOF) to locate and destroy enemies of the United States, the Marine Corps was thrust into the SOCOM realm. In October 2005, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld directed the Marine Corps to contribute forces to SOCOM despite fierce institutional resistance from the latter. The Marine Corps officially activated MARSOC in

February 2006 with a small staff and the Foreign Military Training Unit, a newly formed unit tasked with foreign internal defense. Shortly thereafter, the structure and personnel of 1st and 2nd Force Reconnaissance Companies, representing the most highly trained and specialized Marines in the Marine Corps, were transferred to MARSOC.[4] However, in a departure from doctrine, this new organization did not adhere to the MAGTF construct, nor has it evolved into a MAGTF. MARSOC comprises three war-fighting units (called the Ground Combat Element in MAGTF doctrine, or GCE) and a support unit (the Logistics Combat Element, or LCE), but it lacks an Aviation Combat Element (ACE).[5] Given the Marine Corps' doctrine to task organize units into a MAGTF and create a whole greater than the sum of its parts, the Marine Corps should initiate efforts to strengthen ties to Special Operations aviation and eventually organize and equip an ACE permanently assigned to MARSOC, thus enabling MARSOC to train and fight as a MAGTF.

The Birth of SOCOM and the MAU (SOC)

Special Operations Command traces its origins back to Operation Eagle Claw, the failed mission to rescue the American hostages held by Iran in 1980. The complex and challenging mission was planned by an improvised organization of military units and staff; the units trained for the complex mission for mere months while devising and refining new tactics using brand new technology, all required for the successful completion of the mission. The Mission Commander aborted the mission when an insufficient number of helicopters arrived at the desert rendezvous site to carry the assault force into Tehran.[6] Tragedy struck as one of the helicopters collided with a C-130 refueling aircraft, killing eight servicemen and ruling out any follow-on rescue attempt.[7] The failure of Operation Eagle Claw and the ensuing tragedy at the austere landing site called Desert One led the Pentagon to form a commission of three serving and three

retired flag officers, led by retired Admiral James L. Holloway. Known as the Holloway commission, it examined the planning, training and execution of the mission, and found twenty-three different factors that contributed to the mission's failure.[8] Despite the host of factors affecting the mission's chance of success, they all related to two major concerns: excessive operational security and the informal nature of the task force that planned and executed the mission.[9] The nation could no longer ignore the military's inability to integrate the individual service capabilities and the evolution of smaller scale conflicts.[10] Eventually, Congress created SOCOM to provide a clear chain of command and standing, integrated joint forces capable of executing such specialized missions and addressing low-intensity conflicts.

One of the by-products of the failure of Operation Eagle Claw was a lack of trust of Marines on the part of SOCOM forces. Colonel James Kyle, the on-scene commander at the desert rendezvous site known as Desert One, argued the predominately Marine helicopter crews—one Air Force helicopter pilot flew on the mission—lacked "the guts to try".[11] The conclusion of his book, written ten years after the mission, ignored the plethora of causes cited by the Holloway commission and instead placed the blame for the mission's failure squarely on the Marines of the helicopter force. The Marine commander in charge of the helicopters deemed one helicopter unsafe for flight, leaving only five helicopters for the mission—one short of the ground force commander's requirement of six. While the Marines were willing to continue the mission with five helicopters—two were the minimum required to move all parties from the embassy to the airfield, where they would board transport aircraft for the trip out of Iran—the ground force commander was not and aborted the mission. The ground force commander had his own calculus for mission success, and his decision was consistent with pre-mission requirements.[12] However, the aircrews flying the helicopters were willing to adapt in the face of

adversity and continue the mission with five helicopters, so blaming the Marines for the failure of the mission because they did not have the courage to continue is misguided. Nonetheless, the Army special operations unit that comprised the majority of the ground force for the mission became averse to depending on any other service for aviation support. Their "bitter experience with the USMC pilots flying . . . during Eagle Claw made them determined to form an Army Special Forces helicopter unit that would be able to support them in any future military operations."[13]

Seven years after the failure of Operation Eagle Claw, SOCOM was created without any Marine Corps participation, driving a wedge into an existing gap between the Marine Corps and Special Operations forces (SOF) and further alienating the two from each other. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General P. X. Kelley, did not wish to contribute Marine forces to SOCOM, and guidance from the Assistant Secretary of Defense William H. Taft IV dictated no duplication of capabilities in the newly formed command. When compared to the other services, the Marine Corps provided no real unique capacity; the Marine Corps employed their forces with different doctrine, but had no units with abilities unique enough to warrant surrendering forces to SOCOM. Control of Marine forces was an issue in this calculation, however. In General Kelley's view, the Marine Corps had defended its existence more than once by necessity, so surrendering any of the precious few assets and personnel it controlled was not in the best interest of the Marine Corps. For that reason, General Kelley argued against the contribution of any Marine forces to SOCOM by holding that the Marine Corps could not provide any capability unique from those furnished by the other services.[14]

Despite General Kelley's reluctance to relinquish Marines to SOCOM, he saw the benefit of Marines performing special operations-type missions. He had the Commanding General of

the Fleet Marine Forces, Atlantic, General Alfred M. Gray, devise a way for Marine units to train for and perform special operations-type missions. The result was the Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) Special Operations Capable (SOC), or MAU (SOC). The name soon changed to the Marine Expeditionary Unit—or MEU (SOC)—to accentuate the inherent expeditionary nature of the MAGTF. General Kelley felt that "the Marine Corps should not establish new organizations that would unnecessarily duplicate special purpose organizations of the other services," but maintained that, "within our MAGTFs we have the capability to conduct a broad spectrum of special operations, particularly . . . the introduction of . . . forces from the sea."[15] Thus, the Marine Corps' institutional aversion to SOCOM was seen for the first time.

A second reason for an institutional bias against SOCOM was the ingrained belief that by virtue of being Marines, they were a cut above their fellow warriors from other services. The belief was that Marines did not need to be part of Special Operations Command to be special. Absent the bias towards SOCOM, that argument remains particularly strong in the Marine Corps today, both in the conventional Marine Corps and in MARSOC. Indeed, the second Commanding General of MARSOC was very clear on this subject: "One of the things that really makes me nervous is the word 'special.' All Marines are special, all Marines are equal, and all Marines are riflemen."[16] This idea rings true to Marines today, but in the early days of SOCOM, it remained an undercurrent of dissention against SOCOM while the more politically correct argument of non-duplicating capabilities would be touted publicly.

Synchronicity

After avoiding participation within SOCOM at its formation, the Marine Corps came very close to contributing forces in the early 1990s, this time under the leadership of General Gray, now Commandant. From late 1990 to early 1991, General Gray, General James Lindsey, the Commanding General of SOCOM, and two officers on their staff, Marine Colonels James Magee and David Blizzard, from Headquarters Marine Corps and SOCOM J-5, respectively, developed plans for the formation of a suitable MAGTF for permanent assignment to SOCOM. The plan was developed in secret, and code-named "*Synchronicity*." General Gray understood that the Marine Corps was frozen out of Major Force Program-11 (MFP-11) funding, the program created to sever any reliance on SOCOM's service ties for funding SOCOM operations.[17] He also realized the windfall this rapid, responsive funding stream would be for the resource-strapped Marine Corps, and both he and General Lindsey recognized the positive contribution of a Marine MAGTF to SOCOM. In particular, General Lindsey saw the Marine MAGTF that *Synchronicity* represented as a source of heavy lift helicopters, fixed wing attack aviation assets, ground reconnaissance elements and mobility equipment without the lengthy and painful delay of having to procure them. The two General officers enjoyed a friendship, and they saw the mutual benefit of a Marine MAGTF assigned to SOCOM.

After about five months of development focused on the table of organization and the table of equipment, General Gray and General Lindsey approved the final draft of the *Synchronicity* concept. Within a few weeks of the *Synchronicity* presentation to a supportive Assistant Secretary of Defense-Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD-SOLIC) and the Secretary of Defense, General Lindsey called General Gray. General Lindsey was retiring, and his replacement, Army General Carl W. Stiner, "hates Marines, and will take your

stuff and screw over your guys."[18] In short, because of the bias of the incoming Commander of SOCOM, the *Synchronicity* proposal would not benefit the Marine Corps. The two agreed to bury the proposal, and all known documents regarding the project were shredded and destroyed.[19] Parochialism doomed the Marine Corps participation in SOCOM in this instance.

MARSOC Created

Just after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Marine Corps approached SOCOM to offer support for the intensifying war on terrorist organizations. This initiative led to increased cooperation between the two organizations: aligning directorates within SOCOM with their respective equivalents at Headquarters Marine Corps, providing Marine augments in the intelligence community and at Combatant Command levels, and ensuring coordination on major programs of joint interest like the V-22.[20] However, none of the measures that grew from this initiative involved the permanent assignment of Marines to USSOCOM.

In November of 2001, this initiative of cooperation led to a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Marine Corps and SOCOM, signed by Commandant General James L. Jones and SOCOM Commander General Charles R. Holland.[21] This MOA reestablished the USSOCOM/USMC Board.[22] This allowed eight Marine Corps—USSOCOM working groups to discuss and coordinate issues between the organizations like Aviation, Operations, Future Concepts, Training, Information Operations, Communications, Intelligence and Equipment/Technology.[23] According to the Marine Corps' assistant Commandant for Programs, Policies and Operations, Lieutenant General Emil R. Bedard, this increased cooperation was a direct result of cooperation to save the V-22 and the joint combat missions conducted by SOCOM and the Marine Corps in the early days of Afghanistan.[24] After this movement of cooperation, the Marine Corps would continue on the path of increasing cooperation to

permanent contribution of forces to SOCOM despite its protests. It is ironic that cooperation with SOCOM on the V-22 laid the groundwork for the closer relationship that would ultimately require the permanent assignment of Marines to SOCOM.

The Secretary of Defense (SecDef), Donald H. Rumsfeld, eventually designated SOCOM the lead joint command for planning the Global War on Terror (GWOT), enabling SOCOM to plan and execute missions against terrorist threats on its own initiative, and to seek support from Combatant Commanders.[25] The SecDef was adamant that the Marine Corps contribute its share of forces to SOCOM. He pressured the Marine Corps and SOCOM to come to an agreement on the contribution of forces, but was frustrated by the slow progress of the negotiations. On February 4, 2005, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Michael W. Hagee and the Commander of SOCOM, General Bryan D. Brown, briefed the SecDef on the status of their negotiations. The SecDef felt that the proposed options did not go far enough to integrate Marine forces within SOCOM, and directed the two leaders to continue working until they devised a plan for an appropriately sized Marine force within SOCOM.[26]

Yet, while the SecDef was frustrated at high-level efforts at integration, the Marine Corps had already formed and deployed a unit with SOCOM. In October 2002, Commandant General Jones directed the Marine Corps to "develop a plan to provide forces to Special Operations Command on a permanent basis."[27] A proof of concept detachment of highly trained Marines called Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment One (MCSOCOM Det One) was formed. The group trained for nine months, and then attached to a Naval Special Warfare Group and deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom in April 2004. The unit conducted direct action missions, battlefield shaping missions and coalition support within the regional Special Operations Forces (SOF) chain of command. The unit performed well and earned a solid

reputation. The unit returned from Iraq and prepared for a second deployment, but that would not come to fruition.[28]

The Memorandum of Agreement between the Marine Corps and SOCOM that established Det One also called for a proposal to the SecDef in early 2005, the very briefing from Generals Brown and Hagee that fed the SecDef's growing frustration.[29] In those negotiations, the Marine Corps proposed to increase the number of Marine billets at SOCOM, assign specialized units as required, and increase the Marine Corps' capability to perform counterinsurgency operations—all without releasing control of Marine units to SOCOM. The SecDef viewed these proposals as inadequate, particularly the Marine Corps' reluctance to turn over control of forces to SOCOM.[30] Ultimately, the SecDef mandated that the Marine Corps provide forces to SOCOM in October 2005, and many in the Marine Corps expected Det One to be folded in to the new Marine Special Operations unit. Strangely, the unit was deactivated in December 2005, and the majority of the Marines within the unit were distributed throughout the Marine Corps.[31]

Directed to provide forces for the creation of MARSOC with an initial operating capability by 2007, the Marine Corps faced the dilemma of staffing a new unit during the middle of a shooting war.[32] While Det One only consisted of 86 line numbers for Marines—MARSOC would eventually have more than 2,500 Marines—the decision to deactivate a unit with demonstrated SOF capabilities two months after direction to stand up MARSOC is difficult to understand.[33] Ultimately, MARSOC was sourced by the reassignment of the 1st and 2nd Force Reconnaissance Companies and their complete structure. The decision was opposed within the Reconnaissance community and much of Headquarters Marine Corps.[34] The Marine Corps was being directed to amputate its most highly trained, specialized and capable assets and give them

up, never for them to return. The operating forces were in need of these Marines and their capabilities; there were scarcely enough to meet the Marine Corps' operational requirements. The Force Reconnaissance Companies sourced detachments that served with the MEU (SOC) s, bringing a significant capability to a MEU Commander. The SecDef's decision meant nearly all the Marines with those capabilities would be under the operational control of SOCOM. The stand up of MARSOC was a traumatic, painful event for the Marine Corps, as it dramatically depleted an important capability and asset. The Marine Corps' institutional bias against contributing to SOCOM because of a lack of resources or funding did not prevent the inevitable. When pitted against the will of the civilian leadership of the military, the Marine Corps' desire to retain assigned forces was not sufficient to maintain the status quo. The Marine Corps lost some of its most capable units, but it has been successful in regenerating that capability.[35] Despite the loss of those units, the Marine Corps has recovered and MARSOC has reached operational capability.

The Strength of a MAGTF

The Marine Corps' doctrinal practice of organizing for training and combat in the form of the MAGTF compounds the benefits of a common ethos with the efficiency of unity of command. From a Marine's first day of Boot Camp or Officer Candidates School, he or she is taught to serve their fellow Marines and to accomplish the mission. The Marine Corps effectively indoctrinates Marines into the culture of the Corps while subordinating the individual to the larger whole of the Marine Corps. Enlisted Marines all attend Boot Camp; all officers go to Quantico for OCS, and all officers complete the Basic School. The result is a force that shares a common experience, a common ethos of mission accomplishment and a common devotion to their fellow Marines.

The doctrine of the MAGTF compounds those benefits by creating a task-organized unit consisting of ground combat elements, aviation combat elements, a command element and a logistics element, lean and without extraneous pieces and parts—whatever capabilities are required for combat success. There is no specific formula, but instead a MAGTF is formed of what capabilities are required.[36] The MAGTF provides only the necessary forces for the mission at hand, and places them under one Marine commander—unity of command—a leader who has the same shared experiences and Marine ethos of the forces under his control.

Doctrinally, Marine Aviation is particularly important to the construct of a MAGTF and its effectiveness. While tasked with projecting combat power and enabling dominance of the battlespace in support of the MAGTF mission, the Marine Corps holds that "Marine Aviation's greatest value is its integral role and contribution to the MAGTF's overall mission and objectives." Further, Marine Aviation is "an integral part of the MAGTF and cannot be separated without a significant loss of capabilities to the MAGTF."[37]

Once a MAGTF has formed, the benefits are compounded. Marines build relationships across their military occupational specialties as they plan, train and execute their operations in support of a common mission. The consistency of working with the same Marines and enhancing the relationship of mutual respect and support amplifies unit cohesion. The personal relationships formed across functional lines in pursuit of the common goal make the MAGTF that much more effective. The quintessential example of the effective MAGTF is the MEU, the Marine Corps' crown jewel of an expeditionary force in readiness.

A MARSOC MAGTF would improve upon the concept of a MAGTF as it is currently employed. A MAGTF is, by its nature, a temporary assignment for most Marines that make up the organization. While the MEUs are standing organizations, the individual Marines that

comprise the MEUs are often a part of the unit for a short period. From the aviation perspective, it is common for Marines to serve with a MEU for six months of predeployment training and a six-month deployment. However, permanent assignment of Marine Aviation to MARSOC would result in a standing MAGTF over a longer duration of time, compounding the benefits of building relationships among personnel and shared experiences. This would take advantage of the unique concept of an expeditionary MAGTF that is doctrinal to the Marine Corps, yet not present in SOCOM except for a counterterrorism joint task force.[38]

A Shortage of SOF Rotary Wing Aviation

Significant aviation capabilities exist within both U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) and Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), and these assets provide support to MARSOC.[39] These capabilities include both rotary and fixed wing aircraft, unmanned platforms, fire support aircraft, aerial refuelers and a variety of aircraft to provide mobility, both inter- and intra-theater. Special Operations Command does not possess any jet, fixed wing fighter or attack aircraft, however. The Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps service components source sufficient tactical jet sorties to meet SOCOM requirements, and the level of training and integration required of these assets by SOCOM units is similar to that required by conventional units. Nor does SOCOM possess any strategic lift assets; the Air Force meets SOCOM requirements for strategic lift. Recently AFSOC stood up two new squadrons focusing on a growing need for intra-theater mobility, equipped with small fixed wing aircraft.[40] The Marine Corps has no organic capability of that type, and thus should not be focused or required to address that shortage.

Additionally, SOCOM suffers from a shortage of vertical lift assets, and is forced to employ a variety of tactics to overcome that shortage. The MH-53M PAVE Low was retired

from service in October 2008 after nearly thirty years of service, leaving USASOC's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) (160th SOAR) as the only remaining tactical helicopter unit in SOCOM's inventory. While AFSOC is still fielding the CV-22—the special operations variant of the Osprey, which will provide vertical lift capabilities with unique strengths and weaknesses—delays in development and operational capability have plagued the program. Yet, even after the full complement of three CV-22 squadrons are manned and equipped (the first squadron is operational yet not fully equipped with its full complement of aircraft, and the second squadron, the 20 Special Operations Squadron, reactivated on January 15, 2010), it will provide a relatively small increase in vertical lift to SOF forces. A distinct shortage of SOF vertical lift assets exists, which has affected the ability of SOCOM forces to train.[41] The recent Quadrennial Defense Review calls for increasing the availability of rotary wing support to forces deployed overseas, and attempts to address the SOF vertical lift shortfall by adding a company of MH-47G helicopters to the 160th SOAR.[42] Since 2003, the Navy supported SOCOM with HH-60Hs, providing a continually deployed contingent of helicopters to SOF aviation commanders in Operation Iraqi Freedom.[43] All the other service components are providing vertical lift assets to support SOCOM. The Marine Corps has organic vertical lift capabilities, and while they are heavily tasked with operational commitments, they are capable of supporting MARSOC and other SOCOM units.

Arguments Against Dedicating Aviation Assets to MARSOC

The Marine Corps is a service renowned for doing "more with less." The Marine Corps is charged with the responsibility to man, train and equip its forces by Title 10 of the United States Code, like all other services. Marine units generally fall under the operational control (OPCON) of Marine commanders for training and wartime missions. When 1st and 2nd Force

Reconnaissance Companies became part of MARSOC—and hence SOCOM—the Marine Corps lost many Title 10 responsibilities for those units. Special Operations Command is now responsible for meeting those "service-like" obligations as granted by the Cohen-Nunn Amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act.[44] Additionally, Marine commanders no longer exercise OPCON over those forces in accordance with the missions and priorities of the Marine Corps, as they are now a SOCOM asset.

Likewise, the Marine Corps currently opposes dedicating any Marine aviation assets to MARSOC; the Marine Corps would lose the same Title 10 responsibilities for those forces, the ability to assign them in accordance with Marine Corps' priorities and ultimately they would no longer serve under OPCON of a Marine commander. This would result in a reduction in capability to support Marine Corps missions, and those assets would have to be replaced or the Marine Corps would be forced to do without them. Either would be difficult. The paucity of assets and their operational control is a key reason for the Marine Corps' reluctance to support SOCOM, in the past, present and future. Most Marine Corps leaders conclude—just as they did immediately prior to the formation of MARSOC—that supporting SOCOM with permanently assigned Marines is not worth the loss of capability to the Marine Corps. Most hold that Marines assigned to SOCOM could be better employed under the operational control of the Marine Corps, where they would advance the cause of the Corps by focusing on Marine missions and Marine priorities. The competing priorities of rival organizations will undoubtedly continue to cause friction between MARSOC and the larger Marine Corps.

The preceding argument can be simplified to priorities: Marine leaders—focused on Marine missions and Marine challenges—feel that Marines are of better use operating with the Marine Corps vice permanently assigned to SOCOM. Regarding MARSOC, the Commander of

SOCOM feels the opposite, and neither will change their beliefs because they have separate and distinct missions. This argument is adjudicated when the civilian leadership of the military establishes a priority of requirements, as the SecDef did by mandating the creation of MARSOC. Special Operations Command was awarded the priority for resources, not the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps leadership should recognize the precedent set, and begin to investigate and prepare for increased Marine aviation support of MARSOC to avoid another painful amputation of assets.

Reasons for a MARSOC MAGTF

Just as there are arguments against providing Marine air to MARSOC, there are reasonable arguments for providing the strength of the MAGTF to MARSOC. The most obvious argument is Marine Corps doctrine. While blind obedience to doctrine is foolish, the Marine Corps makes a compelling case for the strength of a MAGTF and employs it consistently. The MAGTF concept is successful with conventional Marine forces, both as the MEU and the Marine Expeditionary Brigade. A MAGTF would be at least as effective—if not more so—for MARSOC based on the points outlined previously.

Some Marines would argue that a more effective MARSOC does not necessarily benefit the Marine Corps as a whole. Some would argue that the cost of extending the MAGTF concept to MARSOC—aviation assets—would be too high and if paid, would result in an unacceptable loss of capability for conventional Marine forces. While—quite reasonably—the outcome of that cost versus benefit analysis differs based on one's perspective, the Marine Corps should be devoted to a successful MARSOC. The success or failure of that organization reflects directly on the larger Marine Corps, and to extend the full weight of the Marine Corps' doctrine of the

MAGTF—and in essence, the Marine ethos of warfighting—to MARSOC would result in a unique organization within SOCOM.

The most compelling argument for a Marine aviation component to MARSOC absent a service perspective is the need for more SOF vertical lift assets. This shortage of Special Operations rotary wing aviation results in over tasking of the existing assets.[45] For example, in Afghanistan, SOF units rely on conventional helicopter units for over half of their required helicopter support.[46] The Marine Corps has the assets required to provide relief. While reassignment of Marine Corps vertical lift assets would exacerbate resource constraints already felt by the Marine Corps, given the high visibility and priority of SOF missions within the National Command structure it is likely that—as in the stand up of MARSOC—the Marine Corps will be directed to provide such support. Thus, it would seem prudent for the Marine Corps to begin planning for methods to provide some vertical lift aviation support to Marines in SOCOM, thus contributing to a problem already addressed by all other services. To prevent a potential traumatic amputation of aviation capabilities and assets similar to the birth of MARSOC, the Marine Corps should investigate methods to contribute to the needs of Marines serving SOCOM.

How to Break the Ice without Breaking Marine Aviation

Nearly four years after enacting a Memorandum of Agreement between the Marine Corps and SOCOM, including a year and a half of difficult and lengthy negotiations that stalled over the assignment of forces, the Marine Corps lost the battle to retain control of its units. Given the shortage of SOF vertical lift aviation assets and the nature of the Marine Corps' recent contribution to SOCOM, it is likely that the Marine Corps will be compelled to meet MARSOC's increasing requirements of Marine Aviation support. The Marine Corps needs to

begin the path to dedicated aviation support to MARSOC—avoiding another sudden loss of capabilities and assets—while balancing current demands and challenges to Marine Aviation.

The Marine Corps should adopt a phased effort to provide aviation support to MARSOC. Given the current formative period for Marine Aviation as it transitions from legacy aircraft to new platforms, the Marine Corps should adopt several low-impact measures immediately while laying the foundation for dedicated aviation support for MARSOC in the future. The low-impact measures require establishing new relationships between Marine Aviation and SOCOM. Additionally, the Marine Corps should begin the process of educating SOCOM on the potential strength of a MARSOC MAGTF. Finally, the Marine Corps should begin planning and organizing for the future permanent assignment of an aviation element to MARSOC, providing the requisite aviation support to enable MARSOC to train and fight as a functioning MAGTF. While dedicating aviation support to MARSOC would involve a cost in personnel and equipment, it would result in a more capable MARSOC and those benefits would translate to the Marine Corps as a whole.[47]

The first step is to initiate dedicated cooperation between the Marine Aircraft Groups (MAGs) and the Marine Special Operations Battalions (MSOBs). The Marine Corps and MARSOC should establish standing working groups between the geographically co-located MAGs and MSOBs. The working groups should be charged with the following tasks: identify Marine Aviation standards of training and employment in support of MARSOC, the desired extent of support to optimize tactical benefits of training and operations for both organizations, and seek improvements to the process currently used to allocate resources to support MARSOC. These ideas need to be codified and captured in MOAs between the organizations and revisited on a regular basis. Through both the working groups and the execution of the MOA, the

relationships between MARSOC and Marine air will mature and grow. Additionally, increased support of MARSOC—a uniquely trained customer with high expectations and low tolerance for error—will challenge Marine aircrews. By consistently providing aviation support to a customer with a unique and highly refined set of expectations, the individual Marines providing aviation support will be challenged and their skills will improve.

A second positive step towards dedicated Marine Aviation support to MARSOC should be an expansion of the Personnel Exchange Program (PEP). Under the PEP, there are several opportunities for the Marine Corps to provide pilots to Special Operations aviation units. While serving a three-year tour, the Marine integrates into the unit. These Marines qualify on the Special Operations Command aircraft, operate in support of SOCOM and serve in leadership positions within the SOF units. Historically, the SOF units are eager to have exchange Marines assigned, as the Marines bring professional aviation skills and Marine-style leadership. From the Marine Corps perspective, the exchange Marines benefit from the exposure to the challenging tactics and standards of the SOF community, and post-exchange are able to take that experience back to the Marine Fleet and provide other aviators the benefit of their experience. The Marine Corps recognizes the benefit of exposing Marines to the challenges of SOF aviation, and the 'trickle-down' effect that their experiences can have on Marine aviation communities.

Similarly, increased Marine aviation support to MARSOC would provide the same benefits. Ultimately, a dedicated aviation component to MARSOC would foster the same opportunities for Marine aviators and aircrews: broadened horizons and increased proficiency. Seasoned, experienced Marines flying in direct support of MARSOC would eventually return to the Fleet, and have the opportunity to impart their technical and tactical expertise on a generation of young Marine aviators. The amplified effect of numerous Marines returning to the

conventional forces to provide this experience versus a slow trickle of Marines every few years in just a few Marine aviation communities is significant.

The Marine Corps currently has two exchange tours with SOF aviation units, and hopes to add a third for the CV-22 Osprey in the near future. A Marine AH-1W pilot serves with the 160th SOAR (A), a Marine KC-130 pilot serves with AFSOC's 9 SOS, and a Marine UH-1 pilot now serves with the 55th Rescue Squadron flying HH-60G PAVE Hawks. While the 55th Rescue Squadron is not a SOCOM unit, the advanced capabilities of the HH-60G provide similar benefits to the Marine exchange pilot and the UH-1 community. However, due to the retirement of the MH-53M PAVE Low, the Marine Corps CH-53 community no longer has an exchange tour, ending more than a 15-year long relationship between the Marine CH-53 community and SOF aviation. Reestablishing this relationship is important for the same reasons listed above: it will provide an opportunity for a talented Marine to broaden horizons and increase proficiency, ultimately bring that experience back to Marine Aviation and make it better. The increased proficiency and experience provided through exchange tours with SOF aviation for all applicable Marine Aviation communities will eventually make Marine Aviation more capable and better positioned to provide dedicated aviation support to MARSOC.

Two opportunities exist for Marine CH-53 exchange tours with SOF aviation, and the Marine Corps should take advantage of both. The first is an exchange tour with the 160th SOAR flying MH-47Gs. A Marine CH-53 pilot's heavy lift experience would lend itself to success in the heavy lift MH-47, and he would be challenged by the tactical and operational experience in flying with the Army's premier SOF aviation unit. The 160th SOAR would benefit from the motivated Marine officer that would qualify for such an assignment. The second is an exchange tour with the 6 Special Operations Squadron (SOS) flying Mi-17s. The 6 SOS is an AFSOC

squadron focused on aviation Foreign Internal Defense (FID). Their mission is to assess, train, advise and assist foreign aviation forces in the use of aviation, its sustainment and integration.[48] A Marine exchange officer would have the unique opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in FID, Unconventional Warfare and coalition support while deploying world wide as a Combat Aviation Advisor, working in small units with host nation forces to build their aviation capabilities. Air Force Special Operations Command would benefit from a Marine experienced in heavy lift operations—skills that transfer to flying the Mi-17—and benefit from a motivated Marine officer and leader.

An additional opportunity for expansion of the PEP program is the assignment of a Marine KC-130 pilot to the 73 SOS to serve on the MC-130W. As the Marine Corps continues to develop the Harvest Hawk program, an armed KC-130J, the Air Force is investigating an armed version of one of their Special Operations variants of the C-130.[49] Establishing another relationship with AFSOC to share the lessons learned over the fielding of unique systems on the C-130 would reap significant benefits for both services. The relationship would enable a Marine KC-130 pilot to gain experience in flying in support of SOF forces, and would prove an incredible source of knowledge and experience.

Third, the Marine Corps needs to begin the process of planning and developing a Marine aviation contingent to MARSOC. The creation of a dedicated aviation unit in support of MARSOC could be modeled after Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1), where Marines prove themselves in the Fleet before assignment to HMX-1 for a four-year tour. After a four-year tour flying in support of MARSOC, Marines could transition back to the Fleet, providing a wealth of experience and knowledge. While this is a tumultuous time in Marine aviation as three communities transition to new airframes and four will transition in the near future, the Marine

Corps needs to concede the requirement for Marines to support Marines within SOCOM and the ultimate benefit to the Marine Corps.[50] While the significant impact to Marine aviation of the loss of assets and personnel to SOCOM would become a necessary reality, the Marine Corps would gain the ability to provide consistent guidance and education on the overall outcome of the process—in addition to the eventual creation of an incredibly effective Marine component to SOCOM. Marine participation in SOCOM is now a reality—if Marines are to operate in that community, they deserve and require the ability to take advantage of Marine Corps doctrine, and to fight as Marines.

Finally, the Marine Corps must begin the educational process required for the effective use of a MARSOC MAGTF. An argument against providing Marine aviation assets to MARSOC is that SOCOM will ultimately task Marine aviation assets provided to support other SOCOM units vice dedicating them to MARSOC. This argument illuminates an opportunity for the Marine Corps: the need to educate SOCOM. If Marine aviation assets are assigned to SOCOM, SOCOM will task them in accordance with SOCOM priorities. However, the Marine Corps has an opportunity to begin educating SOCOM now, in concurrence with a discussion on the requirements and desires of Marine aviation support to MARSOC, on the strengths and effectiveness of a MAGTF.

Historically, the Marine Corps has been successful in educating the Joint world about the strength of a MAGTF. If the Marine Corps can offer consistent guidance and input into a dialog with SOCOM on the evolution of MARSOC into a complete MAGTF, there is a greater chance that SOCOM will understand the significant capabilities of the resulting organization. Conversely, if the Marine Corps prepares for another lengthy battle over the control of Marine units while trying to convince the Joint world that the MAGTF does not apply to MARSOC, any

Marine aviation assets eventually required to support MARSOC and the resulting MAGTF will be alienated from the Marine Corps. The result will be an opportunity for the development of a tremendous Marine capability within SOCOM lost to service parochialism.

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